

Looking Beyond #MeToo:

*Navigating the gender equity iceberg
and breaking down barriers to success.*



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Contents

- 6 Shifting Priorities
- 7 Increasing Urgency, Few Resources
- 7 Current Practices
- 8 Harassment & Sexual Misconduct
- 8 Diversity Programs
- 10 Developing a Gender Strategy
- 11 The Internal Gender Equity Audit
- 12 Determining Leverage Points for Action
- 13 Mentoring and Networks
- 14 Creating Cultures of Gender Alliance
- 16 Learn More
- 16 About Dimitry|Murphy & Associates



Introduction

A perfect firestorm is brewing in the workplace, and a tight labor market is helping to fuel the flames. The #MeToo movement, which first sparked in the fall of 2017 raising awareness of the extent of workplace sexual harassment was merely the match strike. The toppling of several “untouchable” high profile men who engaged in harassment and sexual assault has been the kindling. In the language of firefighting—it is still in the incipient phase, with sexual misconduct merely the cause of ignition. What is glaringly apparent, however, is the availability of plenty of fuel and oxygen around the spark to ensure the flame’s growth into free burning phase. Any C-Suite executive team who does not see the inevitable firestorm is deluding themselves and will continue to wonder why the female employees they have worked so hard to attract and hire won’t stay, or worse: are pushing back against all forms of unfair and inappropriate treatment.

The current headlines represent the first wave of the storm: repercussions from decades of frustration endured by women who felt unable to report harassment and assault. While questions have been raised about their silence, a study highlighted by the EEOC in 2016 showed that 75% of women who report harassment believe they experienced retaliation for doing so.¹ Nearly half of the complaints handled by the EEOC between 2009-2013 were retaliation claims.² And now that women are speaking up, finding strength in numbers and support of allies, it won’t be just about the tip of the iceberg—the stuff that is illegal and actionable. They will be speaking up about the bias, the prejudicial treatment on performance, selection for juicy assignments, for being minimized if they are too nice and shunned if they are too strong. It is the culture of the organization hidden below the surface that will sink ships.



The role of culture in attracting, retaining and advancing women in leadership is hardly news. However, “culture” is a vague, difficult-to-measure metric. Even so, we can’t help but ask what it is about gender and diversity challenges that lead otherwise results-oriented CEOs to accept outcomes in this arena which would be completely unacceptable if the metric were cost management, workflow efficiency, or market penetration? One likely reason is that, until now, there has been no predicted “critical failure” threat necessitating that diversity initiatives be successful. To date, the pipeline of “ideal workers” willing to remain loyal to employers despite cultures that sap engagement or demand always-on availability at higher management levels has not been sufficiently reduced.



Until now, talented, competent women ignored the culture that created barriers and obstacles to advancement and career success. They took to heart the advice to “Lean In,” but now realize they have been leaning into a brick wall.³ From micro-aggressions that do not constitute harassment until they are repeated to the point of creating a hostile work environment, to the gender partition preventing them from building critical cross-sex mentoring and sponsorship networks, women are pushing back on the enterprise that holds equal accountability for their opportunities. Beyond #MeToo, they are challenging their workplace leadership to change the culture. To paraphrase the famous 1987 speech in West Berlin by President Reagan, they are insisting, “Mr. CEO, tear down this wall!”

New workforce values, the reality of #MeToo consequences, and the growing call to address less visible barriers to inclusion, are the fuel for the inevitable storm. The combination of these variables is creating a looming critical failure scenario: programs, policies, and initiatives that used to be considered nice-to-have, will soon become—if they are not already—critical business strategy. This strategy must be grounded in addressing workplace behaviors at odds with engagement trends in addition to mitigating legal risk.

This paper highlights the most recent gender & diversity research to support concrete, actionable solutions to drive a shift in culture where gender & diversity program outcomes can match other business strategy programs. First, we look at the contextual changes facing leaders committed to earning the ROI associated with diverse talent pipeline initiatives. Then we offer an overview of self-limiting current practices regarding gender and diversity efforts, and finally, we present a framework to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to improving results at the highest leverage points within the system.

Contextual Shifts

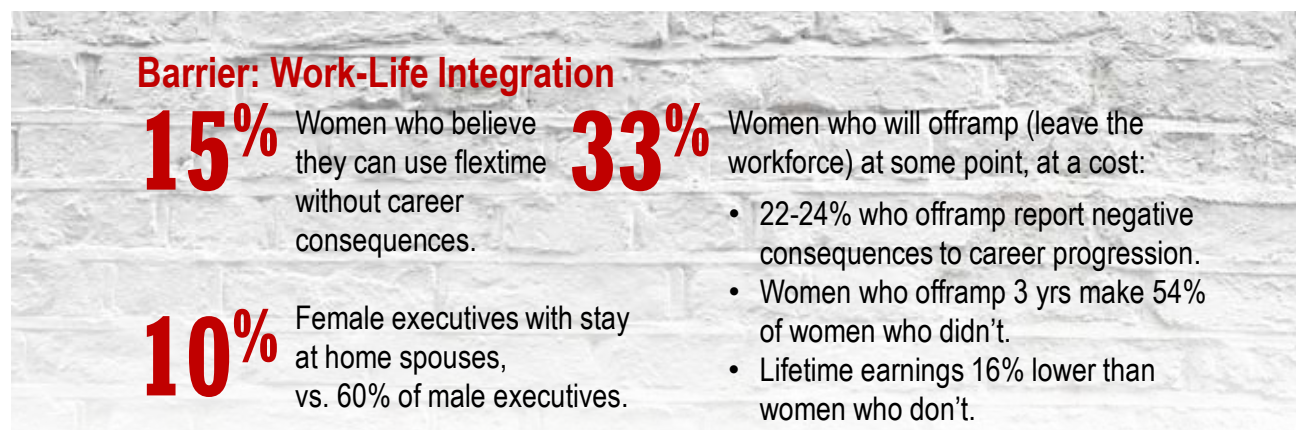
In addition to highly publicized harassment and discrimination issues, the broader general workforce is bringing work-life balance and integration values that until now, have been primarily expressed by women. Feedback from those women detail the interrelated and complex barriers to success when applying those values to traditional enterprise cultures. In practical terms, this contextual shift points to the need for a critical change in talent strategy: to prioritize organizational culture ahead of hiring and retention. Adaptive organizations will look at this shift as an opportunity breakthrough that can produce return on investment in their gender and diversity programs while releasing creativity across their entire workforce.

Shifting Priorities

The issues described above will spread deeper into the talent pipeline without conscientious efforts to address hidden biases and subtle, hard-to-detect obstacles faced by all minorities in traditional workplace cultures. The current environment provides a unique opportunity for a paradigm shift: Women, and the

emerging talent pipeline, will not adhere to traditional leadership career paths that retain structures and expectations designed for a professional demographic that is all but extinct (the sole-provider male who is expected to sacrifice family and prioritize career).

A typical gender & diversity strategy proposes, "If we hire and promote more women, we will increase diversity, which will increase creativity and innovation so that we can become more profitable." A more realistic strategy seeks to create a work environment that recognizes women and diverse talent will differ from traditional workers. The sensible strategy enables and supports adaptability, inclusiveness and employee values for work-life integration. In a culture unconstrained by traditional hierarchies, obsolete career paths, persistent biases and prejudicial behaviors, diversity will increase because employees will have more opportunities to perform at their highest potential. The adaptability lays the groundwork for talent strategies capitalizing on deep expertise to meet client demands in flatter, more networked organizational structures.



Increasing Urgency, Few Resources

Organizational leaders committed to reducing harassment and closing the gender gap in their senior ranks have few resources specifically designed to disrupt the lack of results in this area. Current graduate certificates in female leadership and workplace gender issues focus primarily on leadership development for female leaders. Often, these existing programs provide standard leadership development content sprinkled

with advice to women on mastering a workplace environment that is quickly disappearing. The worst of these programs train women to model traditional male behavior and create unintended consequences when women are punished either overtly or subtly for being too assertive and breaking traditional gender norms. Equally unhelpful are leadership programs which encourage women to just “lean in,” suggesting that ambition and confidence are more significant barriers to success than the cultural brick wall into which they are trying to lean.⁴ Programs targeting business executives, HR and Diversity leaders are superficial, short general workshops focusing on diversity strategies that have thus far failed to produce outcomes.



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Current Practices

Organizations currently deconstruct gender issues into two buckets: harassment and increasing diversity demographics. These gender challenges are mainly managed separately and independently: Sexual harassment is addressed from the perspective of mitigating legal risk, and talent pipeline efforts are often managed as diversity initiatives. Harassment training typically pushes standard “training” across the organizational structure, with the same focus on laws and compliance, to front-line workers up through executive ranks. Gender equity and diversity strategies focus on increased hiring, implementing mentoring programs or establishing employee affinity and interest groups. Rarely are gender issues treated as a “whole” – with harassment and discrimination seen as the visible, and the actionable tip of the iceberg that is significantly driven by the stronger, but less noticeable, undercurrent of culture and mindsets under the surface. By disconnecting harassment and discrimination from gender diversity initiatives, cultural norms remain embedded in environments allowing misconduct to persist, creating stubborn blockages in the talent pipeline. Next, we will review the current approaches to these separated harassment and diversity policies and practices.

Harassment & Sexual Misconduct

Sexual Assault, Harassment & Discrimination represent the “tip of the iceberg,” with the bulk of risk hiding beneath the surface in organizational culture. Focusing on the visible behaviors will not eliminate the hidden causes that can sink the largest ship of gender equity strategy. However, the potential costs of these risks are significant because these are the behaviors that can lead to legal ramifications. Enterprise and Human Resources leaders may be grappling with two difficult questions: How can the enterprise handle incidents or reports of these experiences in a way that does not create a culture of fear or animosity? Moreover, how can programs and training targeting these issues be customized and relevant for all roles and levels within an organization (e.g., line workers, managers, executives, men, and women) to drive actual behavior through new cultural norms and change at all levels, rather than insufficiently mitigate legal risk? Some research has even provided evidence that traditional harassment

training has little or no impact on harassment and may backfire if participants see training as an unimportant requirement.⁵

Diversity Programs

A small pulse survey of HR leaders reinforced our own experiences in corporate settings: Initiatives designed to increase the retention and advancement of women primarily focus on mentoring and establishing employee resource groups (ERGs) or affinity groups. Evaluating the effectiveness of these programs is undeveloped and sporadic, and there is little evidence that these programs are sufficient to achieve the stated goals. About five years ago, in a conversation with a Silicon Valley diversity executive within a highly visible company, we asked about the impact of the diversity programs she was leading. She was honest in her reply, “To tell you the truth, my job is to design programs which we can publicize in our markets to demonstrate our commitment to diversity. Internally, I am not evaluated on actual improvements; I am evaluated by whether I create and implement programs we can talk about.” We suspect her story is not

uncommon: it takes resources to gather, analyze and track metrics.

As a result, there has been little indication that any single initiative correlates to improvements in gender hiring and promotion. Policies and programs addressing work-

Barrier: Unconscious Bias, Gender Norms, Culture

53%

of the global female STEM workforce end up leaving STEM industries.

25-75%

EEOC estimate of how many women experience workplace sexual harassment (largely unreported)

- A majority of operations executives advance from STEM positions.
- Women are evaluated lower and held to higher performance standards.
- Men are promoted for “potential,” women on past results.
- Women are subjected to 2nd generation bias*, the double bind* and other forms of subtle discrimination.

The Gender Equity Iceberg

#MeToo

Sexual Assault

Sexual contact that occurs without explicit consent of the recipient.

Sexual Harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, offensive remarks and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Overt Discrimination

Unfair and unfavorable treatment because of gender (including gender identity or sexual orientation) as covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Code.

Visible, explicit, illegal and actionable

Micro-aggressions

Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. Often directed to racial minorities.

The Double Bind

When a woman is perceived as "aggressive" or rude if she behaves with confidence or ambition, and is perceived as less competent if she behaves according to traditional gender norms (social, nurturing, nice).

Stereotype Threat

When a woman behaves or holds a self-perception on perceived threat of being judged against female gender role norms by those closest to them.

The Gender Partition

Barriers, such as fear of sexual harassment complaints or perceived inappropriateness, which prevent cross-sex professional relationships and friendships, limiting access to mentors and advocates.

The Meritocracy Myth

The belief that performance alone will be enough to earn recognition, promotion, etc., and discounts the importance of networks and advocacy to secure opportunities.

2nd Generation Bias

Bias that is either unconscious or hidden because cultural norms no longer allow open displays of prejudice or discrimination.

Benevolent Sexism

Behaviors that are welcome and acted on with positive intent, but which reinforce patriarchal gender prescriptions (e.g., holding the door, paying for meals).

Hidden, vague, implicit, not illegal.

The illegal, actionable tip of the iceberg won't go away until the undercurrent is made visible and new cultural norms established.

life integration, such as flexible work arrangements, family care, and extended parental leave were listed less frequently by the HR professionals we asked. Where such programs exist, research suggests they are not widely utilized and that only 15% of women and 20% of men believe they can use a flexible work program without it negatively impacting perceptions of their career dedication or aspirations.⁶

These programs are all likely contributing and adding value at some level. What we also know is that they are not sufficient to maintain talent pipelines for next-generation leaders and the research shows they are not increasing gender diversity in senior management and executive talent pools.

Getting to Results

Lack of diversity reflects a culture that fails to create the conditions under which employees can perform at their highest potential. Diversity is an indicator of adaptability and a correlate to—not necessarily a cause of—profit potential. Diversity instead could become one measure of corporate flexibility and innovation which drive improved profit potential. One might even suggest that recent problems challenging Silicon Valley – the failure to prevent hacking of social networks by foreign governments, and the rising backlash about the effect algorithms have to polarize public discourse—may be correlated with the systemic homogeneity of the still-emerging Technology industry.

There will never be a “one size fits all” solution to increase gender diversity.

The gender gap has always been a culture issue, not a numbers issue. Companies that focus on creating adaptable and inclusive cultures, and align those efforts to diversity and business strategy, demonstrate organizational leadership who approach gender issues with a comprehensive, systemic view of the problems.

Developing a Gender Strategy

There will never be a “one size fits all” solution to increase gender diversity. Implementing one or two programs is unlikely to yield measurable results. Like the systemic nature of the gender gap itself, strategies to effect change must be equally diverse. However, systems research can also provide a way to evaluate and design initiatives that leaders can track over time. Developing a comprehensive gender strategy starts with a clear understanding of the gender and diversity-friendliness of the current environment. Data from internal analytics can then inform which initiatives to prioritize, and how they should be integrated to create enough leverage to shift the total system environment and create conditions for success. To use a gardening analogy: It is essential to understand the type of soil you have so you know how to amend the soil to optimize for the growth of your chosen crops.

The Internal Gender Equity Audit

Economic Dividends from Gender Equality (EDGE) Certification and is a global assessment standard, launched out of the World Economic Forum in 2011. While this external audit process is gaining traction in Europe, it is just now becoming known in the US.⁷ The certification provides a comprehensive, unbiased, external evaluation of gender practices, granting levels of certification to demonstrate a commitment to, and success in building, gender equitable organizations. An independent audit may be a daunting commitment to a company just starting to look at current data and programs seriously. Instead, it is possible to formulate a process for conducting a robust internal audit. Such an internal review can enable

organizational leadership to assess their current ability to realize gender equity.

There are ways organizations can evaluate talent data, programs, policies and organizational culture to assess risk and opportunities for driving improvement. Business and HR leaders committed to creating diversity strategies with the highest likelihood for success should explore a variety of these opportunities to assess their current programs, policies, structures and data, and consider how these may be applied and integrated to create an “inclusion health” scorecard for tracking improvement over time. A meaningful internal audit will evaluate available insight and information along the leverage spectrum. Some components of an internal audit should include:

- Diversity hiring data, plus diversity promotion statistics (demographics of those recommended for promotion, selected for promotion, diversity demographics at various organizational levels, and promotion rates over time). A company we spoke with recently evaluated the types of assignments given to male and female professional employees and found that the “plum” projects and assignments, with potential to provide growth opportunities, were primarily given to the male employees. Practices were put into place to equalize assignments.
- Diversity data for high-potential rosters, succession plans, nominations and selections to special development efforts in comparison to the diversity of the employee population pools from which they come. Only reporting that 11% of succession candidates are women or minorities provides little insight; it is important to contrast that to an overall population picture, which might reveal a 40% diversity population.
- Employee Relations claims. It might seem intuitive to search for evidence of fewer harassment or discrimination complaints, but that approach can be misleading. It is important to craft measurement of employee claims carefully since increased claims can be a healthy sign of a culture growing more supportive of reporting incidents.
- Evaluating program impact by assessing engagement, participation, perception, and outcomes of all diversity-focused program initiatives and harassment training



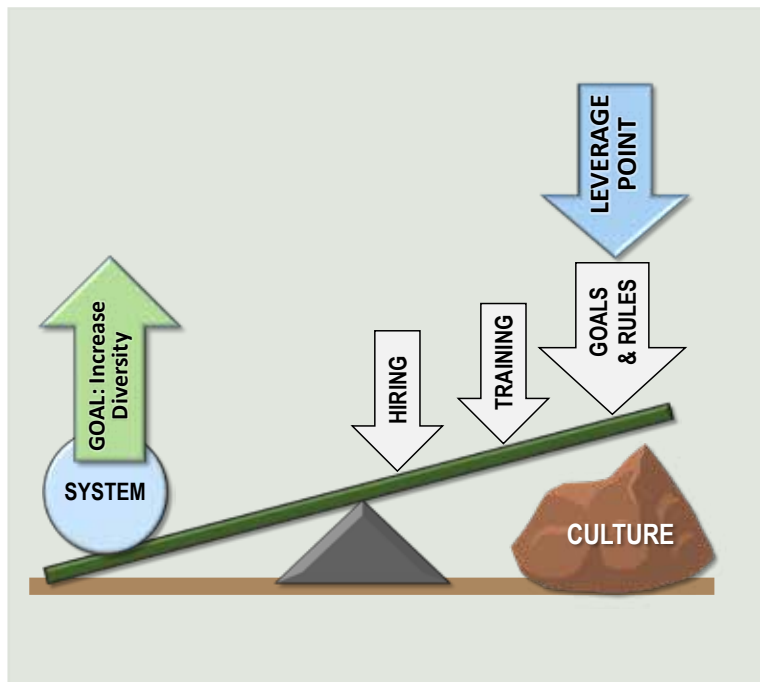
provided (even if for compliance reasons). Doing this can further help uncover hidden obstacles to gender parity, such as a hesitation to use a flex work program for fear of being perceived as “less dedicated” – a reality revealed by extensive research on the impact of flexible work programs.⁸

- A critical examination of policies and practices such as hiring, promotion selection, performance standards, and employee time commitments to uncover subtle biases that work against women and temper ambition.
- A critical examination of internal communications (memos, newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, reports) for evidence of gender bias in language or a lack of diversity in visuals.

Determining Leverage Points for Action

Systems researcher Donella Meadows suggests several leverage points within a system that increase in effectiveness and strength: At the low end of leverage potential, inputs such as numbers (where most diversity hiring efforts focus), all the way up to the highest, most impactful leverage points addressing the systems goals and underlying beliefs, worldviews and mindsets.⁹ Imagine a see-saw or teeter-totter on a playground: adding weight in the center of the beam near the fulcrum will not raise the other side; weight and pressure need to be added at the outside edge away from the fulcrum. Even so, if there is a blockage like a rock underneath, the beam will only lower until the barrier gets in the way, failing to raise the other side.

Individual and cultural paradigms drive behavior and do so mainly unconsciously. Regardless of the stated goals, or even formal rules and policies, without a shift in values and mindsets, programs will continue to fail to achieve desired outcomes.¹⁰



A new McKinsey study gives us hope that even a few enterprises have figured out that single, or independent initiatives do not do enough to unravel the “systemic mess” of the gender gap. They understand the interrelated variables impacting gender equity, and they encourage prioritizing and integrating strategies to address higher impact leverage points. We are heartened by reports that a few visionary enterprises have committed resources to create “initiative portfolios” that address multiple leverage points, and these efforts are demonstrating meaningful outcomes that correlate to financial results.¹¹



The four “imperatives” identified by the McKinsey study align significantly to the systemic leverage points we have identified (above).¹² The first imperative is to “Commit and Cascade” with a compelling CEO vision and management accountability. This directly ties to the high leverage point of the system goals. Next, to link diversity and inclusion growth to business strategy through value drivers, a targeted diversity mix and regular data and analytics, which can push the leverage of system rules and information flow, also higher impact leverage points. The third imperative is to “Craft an Initiative Portfolio.” This addresses the need to approach the effort from a systemic perspective, prioritize initiatives, emphasize creating adaptive, agile and inclusive cultures (targeting the highest leverage point of paradigms), and committing resources to gather and analyze data for tracking metrics (increasing information flow). The fourth imperative: to tailor efforts for impact, recommends both a cross-industry/sector collaboration and adapting efforts locally. This imperative can create an environment supporting both top-down and bottom-up change, which systems

thinkers also know is a demonstrated model for success. As long as the system environment supports change, local shifts that can breed more rapidly, grow exponentially throughout the system.¹³

Mentoring and Networks

A recent survey by HR.com and DDI reported that only 20% of respondents indicated their companies had formal mentoring programs.¹⁴ This, the report suggests, is an obvious and straightforward action item companies should consider as an initiative to retain and develop women leaders.

Mentors and networks matter. A Catalyst study shows that women with a mentor increased their odds of being placed at a mid-manager level or above by 56% over women without a mentor (men had a 93% promotion rate at the same levels if they had a mentor). However, the same study reveals that 67% of both men and women report they find their most helpful mentors independently rather than through a formal program.¹⁵ The study also demonstrated that the mentor’s level, not gender, affected career

advancement. Both male and female mentors in senior executive positions were equally likely to facilitate advancement of a high potential candidate. This is supported by other research that suggests that all-women networks are limiting for women and that women would be better off seeking participation in networks with the most influential members, even if they are predominantly male.¹⁶

Additional research shows just how difficult it is for women to create cross-sex friendships and build these critical relationships, noting that 64% of male managers are reluctant meet individually with junior women, primarily out of fear of inappro-

Barrier: Networks

56%

Increased odds of a woman being placed at mid-manager level or higher with a mentor (advocate).

64%

Male managers hesitant to meet one-on-one with a female subordinate, creating a “gender partition” to networks.

67%

of mentoring relationships that result in advocacy are informal.

priate appearances or sexual harassment complaints.¹⁷ Without awareness of this information, companies often promote formalized programs rather than develop innovative solutions enabling women to identify and build independent and informal mentoring and advocacy relationships, and creating environments where cross-sex professional relationships can develop. Like leadership training programs for women, unintegrated mentoring and networking initiatives have yet to demonstrate measurable results to close the gender gap.

Creating Cultures of Gender Alliance

The predominant focus on sexual misconduct and harassment, while critical and likely a historic turning point for women, can have the unintended consequence of further marginalizing (or at least drowning out the voices of) other non-binary gendered individuals who face equally distressing, but different cultural obstacles. Additionally, many of the challenges that are faced by women are faced by both men and women of color and other minority groups such as the disabled who may confront actionable discrimination (at the tip of the iceberg) as well as

frustrating, often subtle and hard-to-detect biases. Each minority status adds exponentially to the obstacles one must overcome in an environment designed to maximize value for white men.

Even heterosexual white men—who might be assumed to have every advantage in the workplace—are voicing their displeasure around the gender expectations of prioritizing career over family or self. Many men, especially younger Gen Y and millennial professionals, are beginning to challenge and reject traditional gender expectations placed on them as well. These men speak about the stress of feeling primarily responsible for providing the resources of their family, struggling with work-life balance, or questioning the pressure to aspire to higher career positions, even if their preference might be to focus more on work that provides more qualitative rewards. All of these intersectional voices matter in the gender conversation. An important strategy toward gender equity, we believe, is a strategy that builds a culture of gender alliance: that the unique challenges faced by all genders stemming from traditional cultural norms are shared, understood and respected.

There are two simple ways to begin fostering gender alliances. The first is to focus on bystanders and encourage speaking up. Much like security agencies encourage travelers, “If you see something; say something,” or how “good Samaritan” laws encourage and protect bystanders who get involved when witnessing someone in danger or injured. We have heard of some organizations adopting terminology originally focused on youth and bullying, encouraging all employees to not be a bystander, but an “Upstander,” promoting

the behavior of standing up for those being bullied or abused.¹⁸ The other simple action is to communicate and demonstrate an expectation to check what is being said, or decisions being made about women against whether it would be said or decided about a man. One corporate attorney told us she routinely asks her male colleagues if they would say that about their sister or make the same decision about the man in the next office. Human Resources executive Kristen Pressner promotes this same idea with the easy-to-remember label, “Flip it to Test it.”¹⁹ Both of these popular methods should expand past harassment and blatant sexual misconduct to all forms of gender bias and marginalization. In one women’s group, there was even some discussion about appealing to men’s own gender norms and conditioning about their role and responsibility to protect women. It’s what Real Men are supposed to do, after all. Of course, some women objected to the idea that women need protecting (reinforcing traditional gender norms), but it truly does take both men and women to create safe, inclusive and respectful workplaces.

Each minority status adds exponentially to the obstacles one must overcome in an environment designed to maximize value for white men. [...] All of these intersectional voices matter in the gender conversation.

Summary

The number of women who have come forward in recent months to say #MeToo seems to indicate that sexual harassment and aggression is a far more ubiquitous and pervasive problem than ever imagined. Workplace cultures that tolerate harassment or punish women for speaking up might be considered a new obstacle to increasing the number of executive women, just now coming into awareness. Notably, conservative publisher Fortune sees how environments such as this derail and block women's careers before they even get a chance to succeed.²⁰

Enterprise leaders need to understand the current climate very clearly: Women are no longer staying silent. They are angry. They are frustrated. They are fed up. They are done playing nice, and they will continue to make noise, and if that doesn't work, they will leave, creating real risk to business strategies. All efforts to attract and hire diverse talent will be wasted investments if companies expect women to work in a culture where they can't be authentic and can't realize their potential.

Organizations must address the issue systemically, focusing on an integrated strategy for change: including diversity hiring but even more importantly, evaluating policies and practices, programs for development and at the highest point of leverage: raising awareness of, and shifting the paradigms that define their organizational culture.



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About Dr. Dimitry & Dr. Murphy

Dr. Sherryl Dimitry and Dr. Adrienne Murphy have over 50 years of combined experience in HR and operations in industries ranging from Silicon Valley technology to federal government contracting in construction, cybersecurity and defense. Sherryl has led succession planning, leadership development and organizational change within global, multi-billion corporations for over 15 years. Adrienne is a former Silicon Valley senior executive whose research focuses on the female economy and supply chains.



